

# WNSL FLAG FOOTBALL LEAGUE RULES 03/17/2025

## SPORTSMANSHIP

- Coaches are directly responsible for team members and spectators supporting their team before, during and after the game.
- If the game referees or field supervisor witness any acts of tackling, elbowing, cheap shots, blocking or any unsportsmanlike conduct, the game will be stopped, and the player or players involved may be removed for the remainder of the game. FOUL PLAY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.
- Any trash talking or taunting intended to embarrass, ridicule, or demean others under any circumstance will not be tolerated. First offense is a warning, and the second offense is ejection from the game.
- League rules require fair playing time for all players.
- Smoking/ Vaping is NOT ALLOWED anywhere on the fields or other spectating areas.

## EQUIPMENT/ UNIFORMS

- All participants will receive a football jersey that must be worn.
- Each team will be provided flag belts for games. Flags must be a different color from the shorts.
- Rubber cleats are optional; metal spikes are NOT allowed.
- All players must wear a protective mouthpiece, no exceptions.
- Coaches must return all equipment after the last game.
- Pockets are NOT permitted on shorts or pants. Players will not be allowed onto the playing field until properly outfitted.
- The WNSL will have approved game balls ready at each field. A team may opt to use its own ball on offense, provided it is of proper size, standard inflation and is in good condition. Each ball must be approved by the game's referee before the game begins.
- Size of Field—For Divisions playing 7 vs. 7, the field will be 30-yds. wide and 70-yds. long, including the end zones. For divisions playing 5 vs. 5, the field will be 25-yds. Wide and 60-yds. long, including end zones. Field diagrams are provided on WNSL website.
- Football sizes:
  - PK/K,1A,2A,3A—Pee Wee ball
  - 4A, 5A, 6A ----- Junior ball
  - 7A - High School ----- Youth ball
  - Note: All girls teams may opt to play with one size lower.
  - NOTE: Teams may choose to play with a larger ball, but not a smaller regulation ball.

## START OF GAME

- The game will begin with a coin toss to determine possession. The team winning the coin toss chooses to play offense or defense in the first half or differ the option until to the other team. The team losing the coin toss determines which goal it wants to defend in the first half unless the other team has differed the option of offense or defense. Whichever team begins on defense in the first half will start on offense in the second half and vice versa. The directions of the two teams will also be reversed in the second half. Neither team may start both halves with the football, therefore, if you would like the ball first in the second half and win the coin toss, you should elect to play defense first.

- The ball will be placed at the 10-yard line (no kickoffs)
- Time will be kept by the referees.
- Game time is forfeit time...arrive early!

## TIMEOUTS

Each team is entitled to 3 timeouts per half, with one being a 45 second time out and the other two being "clock stoppage time outs only". In this case, the clock stops when the time out is called and then the play clock time begins as it would between any other plays. This would be the same as if there was an incomplete pass or clocking the snap. This rule will give teams one extra clock stoppage without lengthening the game.

- Unused timeouts will not carry over to the second half.
- Officials may stop the clock at their discretion for injuries, etc.
- Note--When a touchdown is scored in the final minute of the first half or final two minutes of the second half, the clock stops at the time the touchdown is scored and remains stopped during the try for the extra point. The clock will then re-start on the first snap following the extra point. In a similar manner, if there is a Safety scored in the final minute of the first half or the final two minutes of the second half, the clock stops as soon as the Safety is called, and will not re-start until the following snap.

## GAME PLAY

- WNSL plays a 7-on-7 format for all divisions except Pre-K and Kindergarten, which are 5-on-5. Each team must consist of the minimum six players (4 for PK and K) at all times. Failure to field required number of players will result in a forfeit and the teams will divide up and play a scrimmage game, which will be officiated by the referees.
- Two coaches are allowed on the field per team for PreK, K, 1A and 2A. One coach is allowed on the field per team for 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, and High School divisions. All coaches must stay out of the way! Coach interference penalties will be called on those inhibiting the game.
- A game consists of two 20-minute halves with a running clock. The clock will stop for all qualifying dead balls for the final 1-minute of the first half and the final 2-minutes of the second half. (Refer to Game Clock: End of First Half and End of Game).
- There is no overtime in regular season play, however, if a touchdown is scored as time expires and the extra point is going to make a difference in the outcome, the team will be given the opportunity to attempt the extra point.
- Play Clock for PK, K, 1A, 2A & 3A is 45 seconds; for 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, and High School it is 30 seconds. Point of Emphasis regarding the Play Clock—Referees will verbally count down the final 10 seconds if the snap is not imminent. This is to minimize any efforts to "dragging out the play clock to shorten the game".
- Each down sequence lasts four plays (Five plays for PK, K, 1A and 2A). Once the offensive team crosses midfield, it has 4 plays (5 plays for PK, K, 1A and 2A) to score a touchdown.

**On a 4th down (5th down for PK, K, 1A and 2A), the offense may either "punt" ----- moving the ball to opponents' 10-yard line (5-yard line if punting team is beyond mid-field) ----- OR it can go for it. If the offense does not score or make a first down, the ball changes possession at the point where that play is marked dead.**

## **RUNNING**

- The quarterback for any given play is the first player to touch the ball after the snap.
- The quarterback may only run once per four-down sequence. During all other plays, the QB may not run the ball until after he gives complete control of the ball to another teammate.
- The center may only advance the ball after he has snapped it to the quarterback. All handoffs to the center must be wrapped around the body to his chest/hands—no-between-the-legs handoffs.
- Only direct handoffs or pitches behind the line of scrimmage are legal. Offense may use multiple handoffs and pitches. No laterals or handoffs past the line of scrimmage.
- The player who receives the handoff or non-forward pitch can throw the ball as long as he does not go past the line of scrimmage.
- Any lateral that is legally intercepted by the defense may be advanced the same as an intercepted pass.
- To avoid his/her flag being pulled, the ball carrier may not jump or dive. Spinning is allowed. If a player with the football jumps or dives, that player is determined to be down at the spot where the position of the ball was at the time he/she left the ground.
- There are “NO RUNNING ZONES” at the 5-yard line and five yards before midfield (except in the PK, K, 1A and 2A divisions, which may run the ball from anywhere on the field).
- Moving screens protecting the ball carrier downfield are NOT allowed.
  - NOTE: A player may occupy any downfield space but may not adjust positions to inhibit the defense.

## **RECEIVING**

- All players, including the quarterback, if the ball has been handed off behind the line of scrimmage, are eligible to receive passes.
- Only one player is allowed in motion at a time. Motion must be parallel to the line or away from the line of scrimmage.
- Players must have at least one-foot in-bounds with clear possession of the ball when making a reception.
- Intentional pick plays in the secondary by the offense are not allowed and will result in offensive pass interference.

## **PASSING**

- Laterals are allowed and will be viewed as a pitch, but the receiver must be behind the passer. Laterals cannot occur beyond the line of scrimmage.
- Teams must pass the ball at least once per down-sequence. Failure to do so will result in a 5-yard penalty for illegal procedure on the final down. Clarification—If a team has not passed the ball by 4th down (5th for PK, K, 1A, 2A), they must either pass or punt.
  - NOTE: A legal pass attempt is defined as a ball that is thrown from the backfield and crosses the line of scrimmage.
- Shovel passes are allowed, but DO NOT satisfy the forward pass requirement (unless thrown across the line of scrimmage).
- No passes are allowed beyond the line of scrimmage.
- Interceptions change the possession of the ball and may be advanced by the defense from any point on the field.
- The quarterback has 10 seconds to pass, lateral or handoff the ball. Once he gives up

control of the ball, the 10-second clock is no longer in effect. Failure to release the ball in the 10-second time frame will result in a sack.

- Play action fakes (fake handoff to runner and then pass) are legal in all divisions. Keep in mind that, unless the player is a designated rusher, defenders cannot cross the line of scrimmage until the ball changes possession.
  - NOTE: If the offense performs a play action fake, the defense is allowed a 1-yard penetration “grace” beyond the line-of-scrimmage as a normal reaction to the fake handoff.

## **FORMATIONS**

- For 5v5 leagues (Pre-K and K), the offense must have 2 players on the line of scrimmage. For 7v7 leagues (1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A and High School), the offense must have 4 players on the line of scrimmage.

## **RUSHING THE QUARTERBACK**

- All players rushing the passer must be a minimum of ten yards from the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped.
- There is no limit to the number of players allowed to rush the quarterback.
- The offense cannot impede the rusher in any way. The rusher has the right to a clear path to the quarterback, regardless of where he or she lines up prior to the snap. If the “path or line” is occupied by a moving offensive player, then it is the offense’s responsibility to avoid the rusher. Any disruption to the rusher’s path and/or contact will result in a blocking penalty. If the offensive player does not move after the snap, then it is the rusher’s responsibility to go around the offensive player and to avoid contact.
  - NOTE: No blocking allowed
- Players not rushing the QB may defend on the line of scrimmage, but they may not cross until the quarterback relinquishes possession of the ball, including play-action fakes.
- Once the ball is handed off, the seven/ ten - yard rule is no longer in effect and all defenders may go beyond the line of scrimmage.

## **DEAD BALLS AND FUMBLES**

- The center must snap the ball between his/her legs to start the play. An exception is made in the PK, K, 1A, and 2A divisions for players that need to snap the ball to the side.
- Substitutions may occur on any dead ball.
- Play is ruled DEAD when:
  - The ball carrier steps out of bounds
  - A touchdown is scored
  - The ball carrier’s knee or elbow touches the ground
  - The ball carrier’s flag is pulled, or his/her flag belt falls off
  - A fumble, lateral or forward pass hits the ground.
  - An inadvertent whistle by a game official
- There is no change of possession on a fumble that hits the ground. The ball will be spotted where it first hits the ground, and the down will count. If the player intentionally fumbles “forward,” the ball will be marked at the point of last possession.
- Fumbles that are “intercepted” in the air are treated the same as a pass interception and are therefore a live ball.

- Fumbles occurring in the team's own end zone will result in:
  - The ball being placed on the 1-yard line (PK, K, 1A, 2A)
  - A safety (3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, HS)
- If a player catches a pass with no flag belt, the completion will count, and the ball will be spotted where the player makes the catch.

## SCORING

- Touchdown: 6 points
- Extra point:
  - 1 point (played from 5-yard line ----- pass only except PK, K, 1A & 2A)
  - 2 points (played from 10-yard line ----- run or pass)
- Defensive interception returned for a score during an extra point attempt:
  - 1 point if the offensive team is attempting a 1-point-try.
  - 2 points if the offensive team is attempting a 2-point-try.
- Safety: 2 points

## PENALTIES

- Referees determine incidental contact that may result from normal play.
- Only the team captain or head coach may ask the referee questions about rule clarification and interpretations. Judgment calls are not arguable.
- Games cannot end on a defensive penalty ----- unless the offense declines it.
- Penalties are assessed "live ball" first, then "dead ball." Live ball penalties must be assessed before play is considered complete.
- Penalties will be assessed half the distance to the goal when the penalty yardage is more than half the distance to the goal.
- Failure to wear a mouthpiece will be a dead ball/delay of game penalty. Players must exit the game until he/she retrieves a mouthpiece (NOTE: once the ball is snapped, players are assumed to have started the play with a mouthpiece).
- Players must wear their flags on their hips/sides. Failure to start the play with flags worn properly will result in a dead ball/delay of game penalty. Flags shifting to positions other than on the hips during live ball play will not be penalized. Each player must check flag position between downs.
- Failure to tuck in jerseys will result in a dead ball/delay of game penalty.
- Offensive Coach Interference results in the player being down at the spot of contact.
- "NO RUN ZONE PENALTIES"
  - Pre-Snap or Dead Ball Penalties—If the offense fouls before (i.e. Delay of Game) or at the snap (i.e. False Start), the defense can accept the penalty, which will put the offense outside the No Run Zone (at which time they can run or pass) or decline the penalty (which will keep the offense in the No Run Zone).
  - Live Ball Offensive Penalties—Any Live Ball foul by the offense that is accepted by the defense may or may not change if there is to be No Run Status for the next play. If the penalty is accepted and that places the ball outside the No Run zone, the offense is again eligible to run or pass.

## Fouls:

## Defensive Fouls:

Offside.....	5 yards from LOS, replay the down
Illegal Contact (Holding, arm-blocking, etc.) .....	5 yards from LOS, first down
Illegal Flag Pull (Before receiver has ball) .....	5 yards from LOS if pass is incomplete, first down
Illegal Flag Pull (Before receiver has ball) .....	5 yards from spot if pass is complete, first down
Illegal Rush (Starting rush inside 7/10 yards or before QB gives up possession) ...	5 yards from LOS
Charging (Bull Rushing) .....	5 yards from LOS & first down
Roughing the Passer.....	10 yards from end of play & first down
Unnecessary Roughness .....	Spot foul, 10 yards & first down
Stripping .....	Spot foul, 5 yards & first down
Defensive Pass Interference .....	Spot foul & first down
Defensive Coach Interference.....	Spot foul, 10 yards & first down
Tackling .....	Spot foul, 10 yards & first down
Taunting/Unsportsmanlike conduct.....	10 yards (1st offense). Automatic Ejection (2nd offense)

## Offensive Fouls:

Illegal Motion .....	5 yards from LOS
Illegal Forward Pass .....	5 yards from spot & loss of down
Offensive Pass Interference (Illegal picks included).....	5 yards from LOS & loss of down
Flag guarding.....	Spot foul, 5 yards & down counts
Jumping or Diving .....	Ball blown dead at the spot & down counts
Screening, Blocking or Running with the ball carrier.....	Spot foul, 5 yards & down counts
Charging (Running over Defensive Player) .....	Spot foul, 10 yards
Delay of game .....	5 yards from LOS
Unnecessary Roughness .....	Spot foul, 10 yards & loss of down
Failure to pass once per series .....	5 yards from LOS
Lining up Beyond the Neutral Zone .....	5 yards from LOS
Taunting/Unsportsmanlike conduct.....	10 yards (1st offense). Automatic Ejection (2nd offense)

## GAME CLOCK: END OF FIRST HALF AND END OF GAME

- The clock will stop in the final 1-minute of the first half and the final 2-minutes of second half for the following occurrences:
  - Incomplete passes
  - Ball carrier runs out of bounds
  - All scoring plays and extra points
  - Any penalties on the team that is winning the game.
- NOTE: If a touchdown is scored as time expires in the first half, the team will be allowed to attempt the extra point. If a touchdown is scored at the end of the game and the extra point will make a difference in the outcome, the team will be given the opportunity to attempt the extra point.
- NOTE: when the score differential is greater than 17 points in the final two minutes of the second half, the clock will not stop.

## **END OF SEASON TOURNAMENT**

- No player may play on two teams. A player that plays on two teams will cause the second team to be forfeited from the tournament.
- No team may use a non-rostered player in the tournament. Teams that use a player that is not listed on their regular season team roster will be forfeited tournament.

### **Resolving Tied Games – Overtime Procedures**

- An overtime period is untimed play after a regulation game has ended with the score tied. During an overtime period, each team has an opportunity for an offensive series of downs.
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- When the score is tied at the end of the 2nd half, the referee will instruct each team to return to their team benches for a 1---minute rest period and to confer with their coaches.
- Officials will conduct a coin flip with coaches, with the winner of the coin flip having first choice among these three items: 1) To play offense first; 2) To play defense first; 3) To choose which end of the field on which the overtimes will be played. The other coach will choose from the remaining choices. Example: If first coach chooses to play defense first, the other coach chooses end of field.
- There are no time-outs in the overtime periods.
- Once an end of the field is determined, all overtimes will be played on that end.
- To start the 1st and 2nd overtime, the offense will put the ball in play, first and goal on the defensive team's 10---yard line (10 yards to go for a touchdown). That series of downs ends if the offensive team scores or if the defensive team intercepts a pass or catches a non---grounded fumble.
- After a score or failure to score by the offense, the opposing team gets a series on offense in the same manner.
- If the score remains tied after the first overtime, teams will alternate who plays offense first for al succeeding overtimes.

### **SHOOT OUT**

- Beginning with the 3rd overtime, "shoot out rules" will go into effect.
- Each team will take turns getting one play from the defense's 5-yard line for one point or the defense's 10-yard line for two points. Whether to go for one or two points is up to the offensive team. Whether or not the team that begins on offense converts, the team that started on defense gets a chance on offense to win or tie by converting a one- or two-point play of its own.
- If the second team on offense in an overtime round fails to beat or match the team that went first, the team that went first wins.

## **WNSL Out-of-Grade Player Exception Policy**

*(For "Graded" Sports such as Flag Football, Indoor Soccer, & Basketball)*

"A team is limited to one out-of-grade exception, when approved by WNSL (decision to approve will not be automatic but considered on individual basis with guidelines such as player age, size, experience in the sport, skill-level, etc.). WNSL, after a chance to observe the player, reserves the right to either (a) move-up the player or (b) move-up the entire team if the player is exceptional."

In some cases there may be a decision that the league approves two players/team to play down. This MUST be approved by league director [scott@wnsl.net](mailto:scott@wnsl.net).